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THE EFFORT TO ABOLISH THE DUEL.

BY H. R. H. PRINCE ALFONSO DE BOURBON ET AUTRICHE-ESTE.

I LEARN with the greatest pleasure that in America as well as in England people are interested in the movement against duelling which I started recently on the Continent. I am not surprised at this, for England and America are less the slaves of prejudice than other nations, and they love and put into practice the principles of true progress, true liberty, and true civilization. I have had opportunities of seeing this for myself, and of admiring it in the different tours I have made in the two countries, and in the English Colonies which are veritable models of honest and intelligent administration.

From my youth up I have had a horror of the duel, which I have always considered as blamable, not only in that it is forbidden by the law of God, but also from the view point of reason, for I know nothing more idiotic, barbarous, and unworthy of the times in which we live. But I did not think I could meddle with the custom, although I was often greatly tempted to give public expression to my views.

As I pass some weeks in the spring of each year at Vienna and a part of the summer and autumn in my castle, which is situated in the mountainous region of Upper Austria, the opportunity came to me last summer of pronouncing my opinions. At the beginning of the spring of 1900, a duel that caused some talk took place between two Austrian officers. These officers were the best of friends; but, on account of some remarks made by one of them, they agreed to fight a duel with pistols. It happened, however, that they made up their dispute almost immediately and no longer wished to fight. In spite of this, the seconds *obliged them to do so*. Although one of the two thought he fired into the air, an unhappy chance directed the course of the

ball, and the Comte de Bissingen was shot dead on the spot. He left a young wife, who was *enceinte*, and two little children. The widow cannot get over her grief, and the adversary of the husband became almost mad with despair at having killed so good a friend.

A short time afterward another affair happened, also in Austria, in the same spring of 1900. This was the case of the young Lieutenant of Hussars, the Marquis Antoine Tacoli, who had served for seven years in the army. Taking upon himself to defend an Archduke whom another officer, Monsieur Szilay, was speaking against, he was insulted by the latter. Immediately everything was done to force Tacoli to challenge Szilay to a duel. Tacoli refused, saying that as a Catholic he could not consent to fight a duel. For this he was branded as a coward, deprived of his commission and placed in the reserve as a private soldier. Later on he was registered as a common soldier in the *réserve du train*, as it was considered that the position of private in the cavalry reserve was too honorable for him.

Another Austrian officer, captain of the military staff, Count Josef de Ledochowsky, who had served for fifteen years, an officer of rare diligence, education and intelligence, loved and respected by his superiors and companions, was consulted by Tacoli, whom he advised in a private letter to lay the affair before a tribunal of honor. This letter was obtained from him by force. Ledochowsky was questioned before a military tribunal about his private convictions, and was obliged to declare himself on the subject. With rare heroism the Count asserted that he thought exactly like the Marquis Tacoli about duelling, and in consequence of this he suffered the same fate as Tacoli and lost his commission. A few days later, the two officers were deprived also of the rank and civil title of Chamberlain to the Emperor.

As I was an old friend of the father of the Marquis Tacoli, and as I wished to give the greatest publicity to those unparalleled facts which the people concerned tried to hush up, I wrote this open letter to the young Marquis Antoine Tacoli:

“ August 26, 1900.

“ DEAR MARQUIS TACOLI,

“ Although I have already congratulated you verbally at Vienna, in May, on your noble and courageous conduct, on the occasion when you refused to ask satisfaction by arms of a person who knew your prin-

ciples, and knew that, faithful to these, you would refuse to fight a duel; yet now that the press is again busying itself with the affair, I would like again to express to you my congratulations and the admiration that I feel for you and for all those who have courage enough to act in the same way.

"Although a foreigner, I have always had a great admiration and deep affection for the Austrian army. . . . All that concerns this army is of the deepest interest to me, and that is why I hope your fine example will bear fruit and will not be forgotten, and that the entire press, no matter of what political opinion, will notice it; it is by this means alone that the inhuman prejudice in favor of duelling will disappear little by little. Among the Catholics, no person, either civil or military, could or ought ever in any circumstance to accept a duel. I am a good Catholic who is resolved never to act in defiance of the laws of the Church; but it is not only on such grounds that I have always been an enemy of duelling, for, considered only from the view-point of the Church's ban, the practice would only be blamable for Catholics, while I consider that duelling in general is a barbarous custom, absolutely unworthy of our times and of our civilization, and one that every civilized man who uses his reason (no matter to what religion he belongs, or even if he is of no religion) should oppose.

"I am certain that a hundred years hence people will talk of these so-called 'affairs of honor' just as we talk of some of the judgments of the Middle Ages, and they will not be able to understand how we were so foolish as to submit to such a senseless custom. How odd it will be to read in history some day that So-and-so, hearing some one remark that he was not very elegant in his person, or something of that kind, had been constrained by his friends to wash out this insult in his own blood! And what will be said of the state of things in which each man had the right to kill his neighbor for a hard word, provided he observed certain formalities and rules, and provided that the offender was of the same class as the person offended, who was forced to expose himself to being killed or to kill. Was it possible to be so uncivilized in those times? they will wonder. But will they not also say that we were slaves, shorn of all intellectual independence, who submitted to this ferocious nonsense, which even then was not sanctioned by any law? And these good people of the future will be quite right.

"It is sad to think that so many people who are sufficiently on a level with the progress of to-day to understand that duelling is as ridiculous as the exploits of Don Quixote—though far more baneful, more criminal and less chivalrous—should meanly give their judgment into the thralldom of the minority and tremblingly keep silence. There is no question of insubordination in the matter; for, on the contrary, to protest against an abuse is to obey an established law. If the leaders of thought had always had as little courage in declaring reforms, no progress would have been possible, and to-day we should be busy burning so-called sorcerers. There is no lack of young men who think in the same way of the duel; and, if all would unite in order to defend their opinions on the subject, these opinions in time would prevail.

"One cannot deny that England is one of the most civilized and most progressive nations in the world. And in what war have any officers behaved more valorously than the English officers in the South African war? Yet these same officers, who went to death with such marvellous coolness, spurn the idea of the duel, considering it below the present plane of our civilization. Besides, is it proof of great courage for a man to go and fight because constrained thereto by his comrades, and knowing that if he refuses he is not only excluded from the society of his equals but also loses his rank—which spells ruin for many of these people?

"So it is that one must kill or be killed or be utterly cast out. What an unpleasant position one is liable to be put into, just to suit the good pleasure of a few companions who decide about it as if it were a sporting game of some kind. In my opinion, it needs real courage to do what you and Count Ledochowsky have done—to allow yourselves to be placed under a ban and to give up your careers, in order to remain faithful to your Catholic principles, and at the same time to be faithful to a law that still exists and which is included in all those to which a soldier vows allegiance.

"Hoping that you will receive many other congratulations, as you well deserve to do, I remain heartily, dear Marquis,

"Your affectionate friend,

"ALFONSO DE BOURBON ET AUTRICHE-ESTE."

The whole press took notice of my letter and in reality approved of my ideas. From communications that came to me from all countries, I knew that a movement against duelling would be favorably received by all reasonable people the world over, and the idea occurred to me to create an International League against duelling.

The League so formed is not of any religious or political character; people of all opinions and belonging to every party are welcome. The work of the League is on two separate lines, on which it hopes to advance simultaneously. One is, to win public opinion. It is important to set right in the acceptance of society the sense of the words "cowardice" and "courage," which are so ill applied with regard to duelling. We wish to make society admit (society is supposed to make the laws) that unwillingness to fight a duel does not make one a coward, and that it is not a proof of courage to submit to a custom which cannot be avoided without terrible consequences. One is a coward if one hesitates to expose one's life in the service of one's sovereign, one's country, one's principles, or to come to the help of one's neighbor in case of need; but it is not cowardice if a man refuses to expose his own life and that of his fellow uselessly, for

the duel neither dispenses justice nor does it restore honor unless blind chance aids it. It is an abdication of one's rights to honorable reparation if the offended party relegates the duty of settling the affair to chance; there can, therefore, be no question of cowardice if good sense is opposed to this absurdity.

But it is not enough to persuade people of a truth of which many among them are really convinced in their hearts. We must furnish them with the means of voting against a prejudice of which fashion has made a law, and which could not have held out till our days but for the cowardice of a great number of people who, mutually fearing one another, dared not show that they could have an idea which had not been originated in the great mill called public opinion. The way to give them this courage is to try to get them together under the same flag. To do this, we send out our circulars to persons of intelligence and of independent judgment, asking them to join the manifestation against one of the most absurd and barbarous customs. These signatures cannot fail to attract a number of others in their train, and they will go on increasing; for, the larger the company of which one sees oneself a member, the less one fears to be compromised by derogating from what one formerly thought an indispensable adjunct to the spirit of chivalry. Poor spirit of chivalry, so often trodden under foot by the friends of duelling, who fear that obedience to the laws of chivalry may draw disagreeable consequences upon them, and who, in order to avoid a duel, often carry prudence to a debasing degree! If the person offended could exact any other sort of reparation, he would be more ready to set right abominable calumnies on his best friends, insults that now he pockets silently because it is too risky to show that he doubts the veracity of the traducer.

The second means by which we propose to prevent so many cruel and ineffectual sacrifices offered to a vain illusion of honor—sacrifices involving useless immolation of precious lives, sacrifices in whose name many families have been delivered up to misfortune and grief—is to obtain really efficacious laws to save people from insult and to give satisfaction to wounded honor, and to form tribunals of honor approved by the Governments.

In Austria the work has been going on actively. At the end of May, 1901, I requested some gentlemen of Vienna to start the movement. In July of the same year they were courageous

enough to sign an appeal, to which only twelve names were appended. This appeal was at once put into circulation by private means, and by December, 1901, 330 signatures had been collected in Austria, most of them being the names of highly placed and influential personages belonging to different religious and political parties and to all the nationalities of the country. The appeal, with the 330 signatures, was published on December 6th, 1901. Since that time, the number of adherents in Austria has increased to 1,500, of whom 375 are members of the nobility. In the course of last winter, a central committee was formed in Vienna, made up of gentlemen of different nationalities and of varying political opinions. Experts in legal matters have drawn up laws for the forming of tribunals of honor, for the organization of the Austrian branch of the Anti-Duelling League and the projects for reforms of laws for the defense of honor. This will be of the greatest service to us in our work, and we hope to be able to publish these documents before the end of the summer. The number of adherents will then increase tremendously. Already, all the Austrian press is on our side.

In France our League has made great progress this spring. I heard lately from Mr. Joseph du Bourg, whom I placed in charge of the movement in France, that, though the number of signed adherents is rather small, still he considered that the movement was accepted in his country because public opinion is now with us. It is a fact that the man who refuses to fight a duel for a good reason is no longer disqualified as a man of honor in the eyes of society, as he would have been in the past. The press is also favorable. Then one incident in France has done us a great deal of good. This was the refusal to fight a duel by Lieutenant-Colonel the Marquis d'Elbée, who was challenged by the Marquis de Chauvelin. Of immense importance also was an article in favor of our League which was published in Paris on March 13th of this year by M. Paul de Cassagnac, who was formerly a well-known duellist. Finally, our first tribunal of honor was formed this spring in Paris. It is composed of fourteen members, among whom are six officers (Generals, Admirals, Colonels and M. de Cassagnac), and whose opinion is that duelling is to be done away with entirely. In the provinces of France also tribunals of honor have been formed and have already been appealed to to settle some cases.

In Germany, the anti-duellist movement has progressed considerably under the clever, wise and active direction of the Prince of Löwenstein. Here the number of members is very large, and in fact the whole country is interested in the matter—all religions, all classes of society, members of the nobility, soldiers and civilians, professors, students, etc. A paper is shortly to be brought out there—the “Anti-Duelling League Review”—which will inform its supporters of the progress of the work. Pamphlets are appearing daily in Germany advocating the movement. The press there is also very favorable to us.

I asked the Marquis Crispolti to initiate the movement in Italy. Preparatory steps have been taken for the purpose, and we hope to have some results to report during the summer.

I have had a pleasant surprise with regard to Spain. I read in “*El Pays*,” a republican newspaper of Madrid, that the Republican Fusion party at Valencia passed a resolution on February 14th, condemning the duel as contrary to advanced ideas of progress and civilization, forbidding the Fusionist Republicans to take part in duels, and decreeing that any one disobeying this injunction should be turned out of the party. They hope that the other republicans of Spain will follow their example.

In Russia all that I can do for the moment is to get the press there to chronicle what is going on in our work in the rest of Europe. Interest is expressed, and I am in hope of some results later on.

I am much pleased with the success I have obtained in Europe this first year, and I have not the slightest doubt as to the final happy results of our movement. The question cannot be settled in a year or two. We must persist in our efforts for several years and wait until public opinion is entirely on our side. This is what I work for and I am sure that I shall succeed.

ALFONSO DE BOURBON ET AUTRICHE-ESTE.